

OPAL MARIE HESS

1913-2010

CHICO: 02/13/2010 heralded the passing of Opal Marie Hess at the age of 96 years. She was born in Chico, Texas on August 16, 1913.

After graduating in 1930 from Chico High School, Opal realized that a small town like Chico could not offer her enough life choice opportunities for her to be able achieve the visions she had for herself.

A career in the medical profession was Opal's passion, and in those days the medical profession restricted women to nursing positions only. She started her nursing training at The Methodist Hospital in Ft Worth, Texas, graduating as a registered nurse in 1933. She then moved to Chicago, Illinois for post graduate studies at The University of Chicago. The next 2 years she worked in a nursing capacity at the Rushing's Clinic in Dallas, Texas.

The fledging air travel industry was spawning companies that were aggressively developing equipment, facilities, and services to become part of this new travel concept. At this time a startup company named American Airlines, began the recruiting of airline stewardesses. Qualifications required that applicants be less than 5'4" tall, fewer than 115 pounds, under 25 years old, unmarried, and a registered nurse. This fit Opal perfectly, and exciting and attractive to her. Her application was accepted and on July 9, 1935, after her 90 day probationary period, she was established as a fulltime American Airlines flight stewardess, Fulltime is an understatement as Opal was an active stewardess until her official retirement when she was over 70 years old. Probably the longest continuous airline stewardess career in the airline history.

Those of us who really knew Opal recognized her as a fiercely independent, dynamic person growing up during the time when responsibility, accountability, dependability, independence and respect for others were the rules. She lived her life accordingly and remained independent and self supporting throughout her entire life.

Her immediate family was very important to her as she never failed to spend the Christmas holidays in Chico visiting with family. She was very generous to her friends, family, and associates. Once she orchestrated and funded an around the world air line trip for her 3 sisters Estelline, Estelle, and Juanita. She was lavish in her gift giving with the gifts often being something she acquired during one of her countless trips to foreign countries.

Although briefly married, Opal was childless.

Opal selected New York City as her base of operation since most of her flights originated out of La Guardia airport. She rented an apartment at Stuyvesant Town and settled in there for over 50 years. She moved to Phoenix in 2006 to be closer to her Niece Barbara Jean Stones.

When she was 70 years old she could walk the legs off much younger people, and put any recalcitrant New York taxi driver in his place.

We will all remember the height that she set the bar as a role model, and hope that her remainders will benefit from knowing Opal Marie Hess. Her spirit, feistiness, tenacity, and determination will serve her well on her next journey.

A memorial service is tentatively scheduled in Chico, Texas on 03/27/2010.

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